

# THE PARISH POST

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHESHIRE, CONNECTICUT  
[www.cheshirecongregational.org](http://www.cheshirecongregational.org)

Volume XXVII

January, 2010

No. 1

## The Real Work of Christmas Endures

By Jeff Braun, Senior Minister

It's been said that the real work of Christmas is not decorating our homes and Christmas trees or the exchanging of gifts. It's not caroling or seasonal parties. It's not even worship or the singing of sacred hymns. As integral as these all are to our Christmas experience, the real work of Christmas is far deeper.

It endures long after the season has faded. And it invites us – what's more, it calls us –to venture forth into the post-Christmas season with transformed hearts, so that, newly imbued and newly radiant with Christ's in-breaking love, we might help transform the landscape and the lives... around us.

To quote the theologian with whom I opened my December (that is, my Advent) Parish Post reflection, the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, the real work of Christmas is:

To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace among brothers and sisters,

To make music in the heart.

This is the work of Christmas. *This* is a sacred call. *Our* sacred call. Our soulful joy.

Whether it is through our Mississippi Mission Night concert and fundraiser on January 3 (to help rebuild post-Katrina), our Church Community Life dinners throughout January (which allow members and friends of our congregation to sign up to dine, laugh, and get to know one another in the warmth of a host family's home), or a one-of-a-kind night of New York quality jazz on which we host renowned jazz recording artist Kelly Mittleman and her band on Saturday, February 13, at 7 p.m. (save the date!)... through all of these, and more, let us be about the real work of healing, of sharing, of laughing and loving. And of making music... in the heart.

God's peace,  
*Jeff*

## 7 @ 7 Dinners to Continue

While the last table has been cleared and all the dishes done from the first round of the “7 @ 7 Dinners,” warm memories of these evenings remain to take the chill off the quickening turn toward winter.

Eight families opened their homes to receive, with Christ-like hospitality, members and friends, for a blessed time of getting to know one another through funny quizzes and icebreakers, wonderful conversation, and table fellowship.

7 @ 7 is shorthand for a small group – maybe seven, maybe more, people gathering at 7 p.m. – maybe earlier, maybe later – for a shared meal and a time to get



to know one another in ways that are just not possible on a Sunday morning.

Our next round will take place in late January through mid-February. To take part in these dinners, please sign up in the parlor on the sheet marked for your geographical Church Life Community, or you may call the church office. If you are not sure which is yours, a map is nearby as is a listing of all the streets in each CLC.

Please indicate if you are willing to host. We are ready to help you plan your evening, if you would like some help and ideas.

Questions? Please ask me.

*Alison McCaffrey*

## January Worship Schedule

**Sunday, January 3:** Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching. Communion will be served. Food offerings will be collected; the food of the month are pasta and bottled sauce.

**Sunday, January 10:** Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching.

**Sunday, January 17:** Services at 9 and 11. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

**Sunday, January 24:** Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching.

**Sunday, January 31:** Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching.

## Church Book Club

Here are the church Book Club selections and meeting dates for the next few months:

January 4 – “Olive Kitteridge” by Elizabeth Strout

February 1 – “The Help” by Kathryn Stockett

March 1 - “The Shack” by William P. Young

April 5 – “South of Broad” by Pat Conroy

**Have you remembered  
First Congregational Church  
in your estate planning?**

## Joe D'Eugenio Named the State's Top Choir Director

Our Music Director, Joe D'Eugenio, has been named the 2009 Choir Director of the Year by the Connecticut chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. The award is the highest given in the state each year to directors of choirs.

Joe, a Cheshire native who now lives in Hamden, has been Music Director at First Congregational Church since 2003. He



earned a Bachelor of Music Degree in piano from the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford and a Master of Music Degree in choral conducting from

the University of Connecticut.

"I am very honored and humbled to receive this award from CT-ACDA," Joe says. "ACDA is an exceptional national organization, the largest of its kind, that promotes the choral art in schools, colleges and universities, churches, and community choruses. Its mission to promote and encourage choral singing has inspired me throughout my career."

Adds our Senior Minister, the Rev. Jeffrey Braun: "Joe is an exceptional music director. This award affirms not only his technical prowess, but his interpersonal warmth and creative passion."

In receiving the award, Joe joins the ranks of other renowned choral directors

in the state, such as Richard Coffey of CONCORA (Connecticut Choral Artists), Peter Bagley, retired choral professor at UConn, and Larry Allen, Professor of Organ and former Music Director of Immanuel Congregational Church, Hartford. Joe has studied with all of them.

"Great choral direction is the soulful art of matching a given piece with a given moment," Jeff notes, "so that the listener might be spiritually moved. Joe humbly yet impressively strikes that very balance, week in and week out."

Joe has also been Conductor and Artistic Director of the Greater Middletown Chorale, which he helped establish, since 1998. It is now in its 32nd season, and is one of Connecticut's outstanding choral organizations.



## Outreach Updates

- What is the Midnight Run? Watch the Parish Post in February for more information on this ministry to the hungry and homeless in New Haven.
- Concert for Gulf Coast Mission Trip: Come to church Sunday evening, January 3 at 7:00 p.m. for the second annual benefit concert in support of our rebuilding trip to Mississippi. We are sending twice as many workers as last year, and are hoping to keep the cost as low as possible for them. The Volta Trio, a

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percussion trio from the Eastman School of Music, will join us again. Our own Jonny Allen plays with this group, which has won acclaim for their performances. Go to their webpage, [www.voltatrio.com](http://www.voltatrio.com) for clips of their performances and more information. Trevor Biggart, also a student at Eastman, will return to perform classical guitar music. And we'll be entertained by Robin and Jack Sellati and our First Congregational Praise Band. Bring your family and friends, and yes, do bring the children.

Outreach support on behalf of First Congregational Church has gone to the Cheshire Fuel Bank and the Connecticut Fuel Bank last month. In addition, we were able to send financial support to the Will Santa Find Me project, to our Malawi mission to purchase fertilizer, and we also sent a dozen care packages to Webster Prison. As always, your generous food contributions are distributed to area food pantries. Many thanks for your ongoing support.



## Pastoral Relations Committee

Did you know that our church has a Pastoral Relations Committee?

The purpose of this group is to act as advocates for the church clergy members. The clergy of our church do a wonderful job supporting each of us every day. The role of the PRC is to offer some level of support back to them. The ministers and PRC members meet at least quarterly to

discuss issues that are important to the ministers individually and as a group. Together, we provide feedback to the ministers and assist them in discerning ideas and concerns.

The group does not take the place of the personnel committee, but is a confidential forum in which to share ideas and concerns in a supportive constructive environment. The purpose is to serve as an intentional interface between the clergy and the congregation to address issues, questions, and concerns that may arise from clergy, individually and as a group, and relaying concerns from the congregation to the ministers.

Current members of the committee are Nancy Brunetti (whose term expires this month), Howard Murphy (whose term expires this month), Mark Hall (whose term expires in January '10), Lisa Canas ('10), Jan Cowles ('11), and Don Lee ('11). Each member serves a three-year term; therefore, two new people are added to the team each year. Feel free to approach any of these members if you have feedback that you would like to share.



## Hospitalized? Let Us Know

If you or a family member is in the hospital, we would like to know, so that we may visit and otherwise minister to you at a difficult time. But you need to let us know about the hospitalization. Unfortunately, federal law forbids hospitals, nursing homes, etc., from telling others – even churches – the names of patients. We must rely on you!

## Update on the Search for a Christian Education Director

Children are such an important part of Jesus' ministries that we want to share the activities of the Task Force and Search Committee working to prepare for the Acting Director of Christian Education and, eventually, the Director of Christian Education.

The Acting Director of Christian Education position was posted internally to the First Congregational Church community, with limited results for the 25 hour temporary position. That position, job description and posting information is available on our church's web site. Please feel free to share it with to any candidates that might have an interest and qualify. The search has now expanded to include notifications to area Congregational churches and Yale Divinity School.

The Task Force has prepared for interviewing candidates, developing both a plan and interview questions so that all candidates may be assessed quickly and interviewed by the Task Force. In addition, the Task Force completed the permanent job description and had solicited or recommended the Search Committee members for the full time position.

All classroom teachers are committed for the January Church School. Curriculum is ordered and the program planning for Confirmation, Fourth Grade Bible Potluck, and chapel are in progress. Because much of the planning is completed a few months ahead of time, we will be good shape for January, but need

the position filled to prepare and plan for February and onward.

On December 6, church members accepted Debbie's resignation, approved the proposed 25-hour job description for the Director of Christian Education position, and approved the Search Committee. It will be: Linda Milton, Martha Strollo, Debbie Kelleher, Sue Branzell/Barbara Lyke (sharing a vote), Pati Syme, Jacki Hissick, Tom Davies and Paul Hackett.

Please feel free to contact Linda Milton at [ljmilton@cox.net](mailto:ljmilton@cox.net) with any questions.



## Church School in January

This month, the focus of Church School will be "Jesus calls the disciples."

**Thou Art, Room 8:** This workshop will focus on the names of the disciples and allow the children, as a group, to identify with a particular disciple. They will make a banner about "their disciple" to hang outside their doors as they travel through the workshops each week.

**Red Sea Productions, Room 9:** Children will create a mock TV newscast where they interview the disciples of Bible times. Teacher and Shepherds will help the children with their research (which will be included in the lesson) and answering questions.

Desert Tales, Room 10: **The Leader**

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**9:00**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Thou Art</b>	<b>Red Sea Prod.</b>	<b>Desert Tales</b>	<b>Gospel Games</b>
Jan. 3	Week Off	Grades 3&4	Grade 2	Grade 5&6
Jan. 10	Grades 5&6	Grade 2	Grades 3&4	Week Off
Jan. 17	Grades 3&4	Week Off	Grades 5&6	Grade 2
Jan. 24	Grade 2	Grades 5&6	Week Off	Grades 3&4
Jan. 30	Special Review Program	Special Review Program	Special Review Program	Special Review Program

**11:00**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Thou Art</b>	<b>Red Sea Prod.</b>	<b>Desert Tales</b>	<b>Gospel Games</b>
Jan. 3	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship
Jan. 10	Grade 2	Grades 5&6	Grades 3&4	Week Off
Jan. 17	Week Off	Grade 2	Grades 5&6	Grades 3&4
Jan. 24	Grades 3&4	Week Off	Grade 2	Grades 5&6
Jan. 30	Grades 5&6	Grades 3&4	Week Off	Grade 2

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will preset parts of the video “Jesus” and use the questions in the lesson to lead the discussion on the calling of the disciples.

**Gospel Games, Room 11:** Children will use different computer programs to explore the concept of “calling” disciples, and then use Kids Pix to write about the “call”.



## Yutes News

Many thanks to Jan Garthwait, Joellyn Jason, and Beth Ross for their leadership in the children’s area of the Christmas Fair. Thank you for allowing us to participate and hang out with Santa all day.

We enjoyed loading up into the big yellow school bus and venturing out into

the town to carol to some of the members of our church. It’s always fun to reach out to people here right within our church and community. The Yutes would like to thank everyone who allowed us to visit.

Our official Ga-Ga court has been built! Games played on Sunday evenings will count toward our official Ga-Ga Tournament of Champions. Up-to-date results will be posted on our website.

We have many fun events in the works for the new year. Keep an eye on our website, [www.yutes.org](http://www.yutes.org), for the latest news. Also, search for and “friend request” Cheshire Yutes on Facebook.

*Todd Skrzyniarz  
Director of Youth Ministry*

## Kelly Mittleman to Perform at First Congregational

Hip. Sultry. Fresh. Original. Those are just some of the descriptions of Kelly Mittleman's singing since she released her debut CD two years ago. In February, she will bring her remarkable talent to First Congregational Church for a first-of-its-kind fundraising concert.

Her show will be Saturday, February 13 (the day before Valentine's Day), at 7 p.m. Mark your calendars now for what will be an exciting event! Tickets are \$20 per person and are available for purchase through the church office and at coffee hours. This concert will be widely publicized, so getting tickets early would be a good idea.

Kelly, a finalist in the Today Show Superstar Contest (out of 5,000 entrants), recently appeared with jazz legend Maynard Ferguson, and at New York's famed Blue Note Café. She has just released her second CD of her original music. She lives in Redding, and recently received an award in the jazz category for the 2009 International Songwriting Competition.

Here are what the critics have said about this remarkable singer: "I think it's safe to say singer-songwriter Kelly Mittleman has a Midas touch!" "She takes the standards and infuses them with overtones of soul and R&B with distinctive clarion vocals combined with a hip, sultry and sexy mix." "A fresh and original approach to pop, neo-jazz and soul. Great lyrics and groove."

This evening of jazz will take place in the Parish Hall, which will be transformed into an intimate cabaret-style room. Plan to bring along friends and family members and purchase a group table of 10 for a discounted rate. This is also an opportunity to enjoy Valentine's Day with a special someone!



## Steve Pritchard Benefit

Steve Prichard, son of Roy and Betty Pritchard, was diagnosed with synovial cell sarcoma in February 2005. Because of the incredible expenses the family has incurred, the senior Pritchards are organizing a benefit.

Please join them Sunday, January 31, from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Waverly, 286 Maple Ave., Cheshire, for an evening of food, fun and friends. The benefit will feature food, a wine tasting, silent auctions, entertainment, raffle, and a chance for the family to thank you for your support. Tickets are \$30 per person if purchased in advance, or \$35 at the door. Checks should be made out to the Steve Pritchard Sarcoma Fund and sent to P.O. Box 131, Cheshire, CT 06410.

Steve has been in a continuous battle with this terrible disease for almost five years. While Steve, his wife, and two girls do have insurance, they are still paying exorbitant monthly expenses, including the costs of prosthesis, experimental treatments and supplements.

## Help Needed to Address Prayer Shawl Shortage

On December 10, a beautiful bereavement service was held in the Sanctuary. The attendees were offered the opportunity to take a prayer shawl home with them to provide continued comfort during the holidays. This left us without any prayer shawls at the present. For this reason, we are asking anyone who knows how to knit or crochet to consider making a Prayer Shawl if they have spare time.

These shawls have brought comfort to many who have lost a loved one, have gone through a difficult time or have had a serious illness. Once you make a shawl, a label is sewn on with the church address and a card with a blessing is attached. You can get these items from Donna Mead or hand your shawl in and she will attach it for you. Thank you in advance for using your skill to make another feel comforted.

### Prayer Shawl Directions

Finished Size: approximately 24" x 60"

Materials: 3 skeins Lion Brand

Homespun yarn

Knit: Size 10.5 (6.5 mm) through 15 (10 mm) needles

Crochet: Size N-13 (9mm) or P-15 (10 mm) crochet hook

#### KNIT VERSION:

Cast on 63 stitches

First row: Knit 3; purl 3 to end of row.

Repeated row: Turn and knit the purl stitches and purl the knit stitches

#### CROCHET VERSION:

Loosely chain about 43 stitches

First row: Half-double crochet in third chain from hook and in each chain across.

Repeated row: Chain 2, turn. Half-double crochet in each half-double crochet across.

#### BOTH VERSIONS:

Work about 2 ½ skeins in this pattern. Use the rest of the yarn for fringe, which can be from 3" to 9" long. Knot the ends of the fringes to keep the yarn from frizzing.



## Report of December 6 Meeting

A congregational meeting was held on Sunday, December 6, 2009. Five items were discussed, four of which required congregational vote: accepting the resignation of Debbie Gravell, Director of Christian Education; accepting the job description for hiring a new Director of Christian Education; approving a Search Committee to hire a new Director of Christian Education; reviewing the Nominating Committee's Slate for 2010; and accepting the Proposed Budget for 2010.

Linda Milton presented detailed information and answered questions regarding the Director of Christian Education position. There was discussion and some suggestions were made, all of which will be taken into consideration. All items related to the Director of Christian Education were approved by congregational vote.

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Carol Warner, Chair of the Nominating Committee, read the 2010 slate. The committee was recognized for its efforts to fill positions with qualified candidates who were suited for those positions.

This was an informational item. (The vote to elect board and committee members will be taken at the Annual Meeting.)

Treasurer Walt Ryan presented the proposed budget for 2010. He thanked the Budget Committee, the Rev. Jeff Braun, and the Rev. Alison McCaffrey, for the time and care they all invested in reviewing the budget.

Walt explained that although the final budget is usually voted on at this meeting, this budget is still preliminary. It is not balanced, as expenses still outweigh income, and it is hoped that pledge income will continue to come in and bridge the gap.

The final budget will be voted on at the Annual Meeting in January.

Until such time, this plan will serve as a temporary budget so that we can get through the first few weeks of January with day-to-day operations. The Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 24, 2010 (snow date Monday, January 25, 2010).

The temporary budget for 2010 was approved by congregational vote.



## Shifting Your Heart

I remember sitting in church recently, listening to a sermon about the focus of Advent and the importance of preparing for the upcoming birth of Jesus.

As I listened, I became especially interested in the undertone of urgency and despair in the words shared that morning from the pulpit. Mind you, this was not expressed in a tone of despair. In fact, in some peculiar manner, the words seemed inviting to me.

They were about the distraction of commercialism and overuse of consumerism and how it affects us all. As the sermon continued, I thought, “What happens if I try to put my faith first this upcoming year? Surely this would lead to an unfilled and rather colorless existence for my needs and desires, wouldn’t it?”

That morning, for me, I believe, the message was definitely between the words. It was an invitation to adjust my attention, and not necessarily stomp away every natural tendency to search for satisfaction in consumption.

God is not checking for a perfect balance sheet at the end of the month. God does hope each one of us considers an invitation to turn our focus toward him. Choosing to prioritize him will ultimately bring each one of us closer to our true spiritual path and fulfillment.

Maybe if we adjust the focus away from our perceived economic desires, things

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may not be too bad! Perhaps the question we should ask ourselves is: "How is my income serving my heart and spirit?"

A monthly pledge can be a great first step in shifting your heart. Typically, our first thought is to believe we will have less after pledging. However, the actual translation of a pledge is, "I am putting my faith in God first". This can lead the way to a new faith journey and spiritual growth in a direction which we may never have expected.

This year, I am confident that if you go knocking on the door of faith with an open and giving heart without expectation, the door will be answered in ways which will leave you more, not less!

*Bill Mann  
Stewardship Committee*

### Lectionary for January

**Sunday, January 3:** Jeremiah 31: 7-14; Psalm 147: 12-20; Wisdom of Solomon 10: 15-21; Ephesians 1: 3-14; John 1: 1-18.

**Sunday, January 10:** Isaiah 43: 1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8: 14-17; Luke 3: 15-22.

**Sunday, January 17:** Isaiah 62: 1-5; Psalm 36: 5-10; 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11; John 2: 1-11.

**Sunday, January 24:** Nehemiah 8: 1-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31; Luke 4: 14-21.

**Sunday, January 31:** Jeremiah 1: 4-10; Psalm 71: 1-6; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13; Luke 4: 21-30.

### Letters of Thanks

Thank you to John Bates, small chores chairman. We want to thank you for all our yard work this summer that you helped us with. Anyone needing help – we can tell you John is willing and able!

*Ann and Joe Madden*

Many thanks for your kindness, prayers, cards, flowers, telephone calls and especially for the Rev. Jeff Braun, who visited with me at the hospital. I am glad to be back worshipping with you.

*Farshid Hakim*

Thank you for making Lia's Baptism such a special and memorable day.

*Brian, Tonya, Tyler, Trevor, and Lia Steskla*

Thank you for the lovely bouquet Jackie Cole delivered to me. It was a joy to meet Jackie and to receive the flowers. I have been a member of First Congregational Church for many years, and I am grateful for the love and guidance it has given me. Looking at the beautiful flowers reminds me of the love we share as we celebrate the birth of Jesus together, we are a bouquet that brings forth His beauty.

*Helen Raynor*

Thank you to all who baked for the church Christmas Fair held on December 5. The variety and quality of offerings was noted by all of the eager buyers. Our bounty was sold in its entirety by 2:30 in the afternoon. Not only was it profitable for the church, it lent itself to a wonderful spirit with the buyers. We hope to create a cookbook with the recipes you included with your treats for next year's fair.

*Jan Cowles and Regan Huntley*

# Milestones

in the life of our church family

## **Baptisms:**

Katherine Elizabeth Chapman, child of Gunnar and Kathleen Chapman, baptized on November 22.

## **Deaths:**

Jean Castler, L. Brian Castler's mother, on November 14.

David Williams, Pat Turner's brother, on November 11.

Pauline Grudzias, Rich Grudzias' mother, on November 22.

Dorothy Swanson, Suzanne Lawson's mother, on November 23.

Bill Gager, Ellie Gager's husband, on November 29.

Lloyd "Mickey" McPhee, Maegan McPhee's husband, on December 1.